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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MARR](#) [KN](#) [KS](#) [JA](#)  
SUBJECT: JAPANESE, ROK OFFICIALS' AND ACADEMICS' VIEWS ON  
U.S.-JAPAN-ROK TRILATERAL SECURITY COOPERATION

REF: 08 SECDEF 8291

Classified By: James P. Zumwalt, Charge d'Affaires, a.i.; reasons 1.4 (b/d)

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SUMMARY  
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1. (S) Japanese government officials and academics express strong interest in pursuing U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral security dialogues at all levels, partly to augment Japan's defense posture and international peace activities, but mainly to improve bilateral defense cooperation between Japan and the ROK. They believe that progress in trilateral dialogue with the United States can lead eventually to bilateral dialogue between Japan and the ROK on contingency planning with respect to North Korea, so long as both governments put history and territorial issues behind them. However, South Korean contacts in Japan point out that: the ROK only participated reluctantly in trilateral dialogue involving the United States; most ROK government officials remain wary of security and defense cooperation with Japan; and the fundamental issue of mutual trust in terms of security and defense issues cannot be resolved simply by "moving beyond" history and territorial disputes.

2. (S) COMMENT: Trilateral security and defense dialogue with the Japan and ROK will require close U.S. supervision and proactive engagement with both governments. The U.S. Government needs to use the opportunity provided by the current positive atmosphere between Tokyo and Seoul to help the two allies strengthen mutual trust, both in trilateral and bilateral settings. The close coordination demonstrated by the Japanese and ROK governments in the events leading up to, and following the recent Taepodong-II ballistic missile launch by the DPRK is an indication that some of the barrier between the two neighbors can be broken down. Trilateral dialogue in all its various forms -- especially the trilateral J-5 strategy talks -- can be helpful in this

process. End Comment and Summary.

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BACKGROUND  
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13. (C) The complicated bilateral relationship between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) presents a challenge to U.S. goals of enhancing trilateral defense and security cooperation with the two allies. Despite recent improvements in Japan-ROK relations since the change in South Korea's administration in 2008, the scope of bilateral security dialogue between the two neighbors remains modest, while trilateral security talks with the United States continue to require active leadership by the U.S. Government. Embassy Tokyo surveyed the views of several Japanese and South Korean interlocutors from government and academia on the prospects for trilateral defense and security cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the ROK.

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JAPAN SEEKS SECURITY DIALOGUE WITH ROK  
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14. (S) Japanese government officials and academics expressed broad support for trilateral defense and security dialogue with the United States and the ROK. Enhancing Japan's defense posture and responding to destabilizing acts by the DPRK or regime collapse in North Korea features prominently in their reasoning supporting Japan's pursuit of policy-level, bilateral and trilateral security talks with the two governments. Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division Deputy Director Noriaki Abe told Embassy Tokyo that the current lack of dialogue between the Japanese and ROK governments on Korean Peninsula contingencies at the policy, operational, or even academic levels has hamstrung efforts to plan effectively for evacuating Japanese citizens from South Korea using Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) assets in the event of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula. The Japanese government needs information from the ROK on possible noncombatant assembly points, facilities to be used for sheltering evacuees in a contingency, and airfields and ports to be used for evacuating noncombatants. More importantly, it would need permission from the ROK government to allow JSDF aircraft and vessels to enter South Korea in evacuation scenarios -- something Seoul has yet to agree to grant. Leveraging the trilateral discussions with the United States would be a useful way to urge the ROK government to be more forward-leaning in its bilateral talks with Japan, Abe said.

15. (C) National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies (GRIPS) Professor Narushige Michishita, a former Assistant Councilor for National Security and Crisis Management at the Cabinet Secretariat, asserted that comprehensive trilateral security cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the ROK is desirable both in terms of Japanese national security interests, as well as the three countries' contribution to international security. Although the three governments have maintained trilateral coordination in the Six-Party process, as well as in the trilateral policy-planning talks, a trilateral dialogue focusing on defense and operational issues has been conspicuously missing in recent years. The three countries could, for example, find ways to provide trilateral capabilities in regional disaster relief exercises, or bring their respective expertise to Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercises. They could also begin studying their possible roles and missions in a unified Korea scenario, including stabilization efforts, disarmament, and law enforcement. Combining the three countries' capabilities would also help address some of the JSDF's shortfalls -- in essence, act as a force-multiplier, Michishita asserted.

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CURRENT TRACK 1, TRACK 1.5 TALKS SATISFACTORY FOR NOW  
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16. (S) Japanese government officials are anxious to engage in robust discussion with their ROK counterparts on issues that directly affect Japan's salient security interests, but are willing to proceed at a moderate pace (for the time being) in order to keep the dialogue alive. They believe the ROK government is beginning, after the Roh administration, to warm up to Japan on security issues and do not want to jeopardize the still-forming relationship by pushing too early for an ambitious agenda. Ministry of Defense (MOD) Strategic Planning Office Director Koichiro Nakajima said senior MOD officials are pleased in general with the results of the November 2008 senior-level bilateral security talks with the ROK in Fukuoka, the reinvigorated Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) among the United States, Japan, and the ROK (reftel), the trilateral J-5 strategy talks, and the ongoing "track 1.5" trilateral discussions involving defense think-tanks from all three countries. In particular, Japanese participants came away from the 2008 bilateral talks in Fukuoka with a greater sense of optimism than they did after the previous year's round hosted by the ROK in Jeju.

17. (S) Nakajima pointed out, however, that the substance of the discussion did not progress much beyond that of the 2007 round of talks despite the visible improvement in atmosphere.

The Japanese side will work to move future security forums involving the ROK gradually beyond politically-neutral issues -- peacekeeping operations (PKO), regional assessments, disaster relief, anti-piracy -- and allow all sides to have frank exchanges about Korean Peninsula contingency issues. While Tokyo realizes that preparing Seoul to engage in such discussion will take time, the Japanese government will use every opportunity to persuade the South Koreans, Nakajima said.

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OVERALL, A SENSE OF IMPROVED JAPAN-ROK RELATIONS  
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18. (S) Nakajima asserted that the improved atmosphere in the bilateral security talks reflects an overall improvement in bilateral relations since the beginning of the new South Korean administration. Long-standing history and territorial issues are, he noted, the only remaining barriers to a closer level of cooperation. If Japan and the ROK move beyond history and territorial issues, Nakajima argued, achieving closer defense ties between the two governments should not be difficult, given the history of cooperation between the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) and the ROK military during their UN PKO missions to East Timor a decade ago. The two forces' participation in the 2008 joint search and rescue exercise (SAREX) is another good example of defense cooperation. The key, Nakajima noted, is to institutionalize such cooperation beyond military-to-military engagement. Still, he noted, improving the defense and security relationship will take time and effort for both governments to make up for the near-absence of defense or security talks under the Roh Moo-hyun government. Specifically, it will take time for the good will between the governments to work its way through their respective bureaucracies, Nakajima noted.

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BILATS APPEAR TO BE IMPROVING, BUT...  
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19. (S) MOD Defense Policy Bureau Director General Nobushige Takamizawa recently told visiting researchers from the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies (APCSS) to keep their expectations modest with respect to the Japan-ROK security relationship and trilateral talks with the United States. While trilateral cooperation with the United States could help facilitate discussion between the ROK and Japan, the three-way dialogue will repeatedly be hampered by the ROK's hesitation to pursue meaningful security dialogue. Takamizawa acknowledged that South Korea appears to be willing to raise its level of participation in the Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) and other trilateral dialogue with the United States, but questioned the extent to which the South

Koreans are prepared to advance the discussion.

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WHERE TO START: MOD VIEWS  
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10 (S) Takamizawa stressed that planning for Korean Peninsula contingencies with the United States and the ROK is a long-term goal for the Japanese government. That said, he singled out disaster relief as a good starting point for the three countries to explore real areas for cooperation. The key, Takamizawa noted, is to build mutual confidence and hammer out common strategic and operational objectives through bilateral and trilateral security dialogue, building on input from the various track 1.5 discussions. Focusing on trilateral disaster relief and PKO cooperation in the interim is a good "ice breaker" for Japan and the ROK. Disaster relief operations (DRO) is especially useful as an area of cooperation for Japan because the JSDF and civilian agencies can bring substantial experience and know-how to the discussion, and because the Japanese public supports JSDF involvement in DRO. It also stands the least chance of causing political problems for the ROK government, making it a more sustainable collaborative effort than any other security issue, Takamizawa said.

11. (S) Takamizawa stated that MOD expects a number of deliverables from trilateral disaster relief cooperation: information exchange on each country's response time for disasters; common understanding among all three parties on each government's requirements for, or restrictions on troop deployment to disaster-hit areas; identified requirements for international cooperation, including equipment, communication needs, etc; a draft trilateral plan for responding to disasters by all three parties, including roles, missions, and capabilities; and information sharing arrangements. The three countries could also share their experiences on reconstruction and stabilization and map out possible division of labor. Takamizawa added that Japan stands to gain a lot from such discussion, as the ROK military has the capacity to support post-conflict reconstruction and stabilization operations that the JSDF currently lacks.

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WHERE JAPAN WANTS TO BE  
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12. (S) Takamizawa pointed out the JSDF is trying to persuade the ROK military to participate in a joint exercise for chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) attacks. MOD considers such cooperation to be a top priority, as Japan stands to suffer considerable collateral damage if the DPRK were to use CBRN weapons in the event of a conflict. Both sides should discuss CBRN cooperation in detail subsequent to bilateral and trilateral discussions on disaster relief and PKOs, followed by responding to terrorist attacks. Building on the success of these discussions, it may be possible at some point in the future for all three countries to have frank discussions on planning for a Korean Peninsula contingency. Although many members of the JSDF feel compelled to push the ROK for early discussion on contingency planning, MOD prefers to take a phased approach, Takamizawa said.

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ROK PARTICIPATION ENTIRELY AT U.S. BEHEST  
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13. (S) South Korean interlocutors, in contrast to our Japanese contacts, provide a more somber assessment of the state of Japan-ROK bilateral security talks, as well as prospects for the U.S.-Japan-ROK defense and security dialogue. ROK Embassy Counselor Kim Tae-jin told Embassy Tokyo that ROK government participation in the November 2008 Defense Trilateral Talks (DTT) held in Washington was entirely due to strong U.S. Government pressure. While the ROK's political leaders supported South Korea's participation in the November DTT, government agencies did not have a

unified position at the outset. Policy coordination took considerably longer than usual because of a number of factors -- not the least of which is the ROK bureaucracy's institutional resistance to engaging the Japanese government on contingency planning involving North Korea. South Korean officials widely regard the DTT and other examples of trilateral security dialogue involving Japan as "U.S. initiatives" that present little to no benefit in terms of the ROK's national security interests, Kim added.

¶14. (S) Counselor Kim pointed out that President Lee Myung-bak personally desires stronger trilateral security cooperation with the United States and Japan, but is unable in his weakened political position to show an overt display of cooperation. There is, according to Kim, nearly no public support for working with Japan on defense issues in South Korea. This, Kim stressed, is why the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) limits its participation in the DTT to the working level. A forum perceived by the public to be an event primarily among defense ministry counterparts from the three countries is less sensitive than if MOFAT were to take the lead, Kim explained.

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ROK OBLIGING, BUT MANEUVERING THROUGH POLITICAL MINEFIELD  
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¶15. (S) Counselor Kim stated the ROK government will continue to participate in the DTT. The U.S. desire to advance trilateral security cooperation is understandable from MOFAT's point of view. Washington should, however, manage its expectations about the DTT, given the unique nature of ROK-Japan relations. Citing the Japanese delegation's draft presentation slide that listed a unified Korea and the Takeshima/Dokdo territorial dispute as major Japanese security challenges that was shown mistakenly during the ROK-Japan bilateral session of the November DTT, Kim argued that the Japanese side is simply out of touch with the ROK's political reality. "Confidence building does not happen in a vacuum," he stressed. Against such backdrop, few ROK officials are willing to advocate on behalf of enhanced Japan-ROK bilateral security relations risking their own credibility, said Kim.

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FUNDAMENTAL MISINTERPRETATION BY JAPAN  
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¶16. (C) Dr. Kim Changsu, Visiting Research Fellow at the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS) and Senior Research Fellow at the Korea Institute for Defense Analysis (KIDA), told Embassy Tokyo that trilateral security cooperation with the United States and Japan fails to resonate with many South Koreans for a number of reasons. Chief among them, Kim pointed out, is the deep-seated Korean distrust toward the Japanese, particularly on military or security issues. More specifically, Koreans across the entire spectrum of government, military, and academia either fail to see the need to discuss Korean Peninsula contingencies with Japan, bilaterally or otherwise, or question Japan's possible ulterior motive for being interested in what the ROK considers to be one of its most closely-guarded secrets -- an issue it is willing to share with the United States only in a bilateral alliance context.

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DISTRUST TO THE POINT OF PROTESTING JSDF MILITARY BAND  
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¶17. (C) Dr. Kim noted that Japanese government officials and academics have an overly simplistic view of the South Korean political landscape as it relates to Japan and security issues. According to Kim, Japanese assessments that the ROK and Japanese governments need merely to "move beyond" history and territorial issues demonstrate a significant gap in understanding between the two countries on the nature of the bilateral relationship. The problem in Korea, Kim argued, is both institutional and emotional. ROK government national



security agencies, including MOFAT and the Ministry of National Defense (MND), have developed over the years a tendency to keep at arms length security and defense engagement with Japan for fear of public backlash. Projects involving the JSDF are especially unattractive to ROK government officials, as they evoke in the Korean public's mind memories of colonial oppression and forced conscription of Korean men into the Imperial Army during World War II.

¶18. (C) Dr. Kim, explaining the sensitivity and distrust in Korea toward Japan, raised the recent protestations by the local community in the South Korean port city of Jinhae to JSDF participation in the April 3-5 Jinhae World Military Band and Color Guard Festival. The Jinhae City Municipal Government homepage received a staggering number of protest emails opposing the participation of the JSDF band, crippling the network for hours. If the Korean public is unwilling to allow the JSDF band from participating in a music festival, there is no way it would tolerate collaboration with the Japanese government on Korean Peninsula contingency issues, Kim concluded.

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THE UNHELPFUL: INSUFFICIENT JAPANESE CIV-MIL CONSENSUS  
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¶19. (C) Lack of consensus between Japanese civilian bureaucrats and uniformed JSDF officers on the need for, as well as the scope of cooperation with the ROK, presents yet another hurdle to effective security dialogue between Japan and the ROK. GRIPS' Michishita noted that many senior JSDF officers expressed skepticism when he had urged them during his time in the Cabinet Secretariat to be more forward-leaning on bilateral military cooperation with the ROK. Many Japan Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF) officers, in particular, did not believe they would gain much from navy-to-navy cooperation with the comparatively less-developed ROK Navy. Others, while generally positive toward bilateral cooperation, expressed concerns about limited resources and manpower that could be better used on other JMSDF endeavors. Michishita said he had pointed out repeatedly that the ROK Navy was rapidly upgrading its capabilities and had significantly more personnel than the JMSDF, even if it trailed Japan in terms of the number of destroyers, frigates, and other maritime assets. Moreover, the ROK Navy, which sought to have a blue-water navy by 2020, was eager to engage the JMSDF for their know-how and their capabilities. Michishita added that he had stressed to the JMSDF that the potential for interoperability between the two forces increased as the ROK Navy continued to acquire anti-submarine warfare and Aegis capabilities.

ZUMWALT